

Watch for Work Zone Signs of Summer



One sure sign of summer in Montana is an increase in highway construction. MDT reminds motorists that work zones are hazardous, and it is essential to drive with caution through these areas. Last year, 320 crashes took place in construction zones along Montana roadways. Of those crashes, there were ten fatalities and 180 persons injured.

Remember to stay alert and observe posted signs when traveling through work zones. Last year, 78 percent of Montana's

work zone crashes were on straight roads, and 91 percent occurred during clear weather. Eighty percent of crashes were on dry roads, and 79 percent occurred during daylight.

MDT suggests following these safety tips when driving through work zones:

- Plan ahead — dial 511 or visit www.mdt511.com for current construction and road information.

- Pay attention to signs and obey road-crew flaggers.
- Be alert, expect the unexpected — avoid distractions.
- Remain calm and patient — work zones are designed for safety, and the purpose of projects is to improve the roads for future travel.
- Follow posted speeds, even when crews are not present.
- Keep headlights on, even when you are stopped.
- Give large trucks extra room.
- Don't tailgate.

Even when a work zone looks inactive, it is vital to follow posted signs. Although work may not be underway, conditions may present hazards that are not readily apparent but require slower speeds and extra caution.



Director Testifies Before National Transportation Panel

Highways in Montana and other rural western states are essential to the national economy and must be considered in setting priorities for future federal transportation funding. That was the message Jim Lynch, director of the Montana Department of Transportation, delivered at a hearing of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission in Minneapolis on April 18.

"At previous hearings, the commission heard a lot about the need to direct more federal funding to seaports and large metropolitan areas," Lynch said. "I made sure the commission understands the importance of safe and modern highways in rural states in getting our products to national and international markets. The U.S. transportation system isn't just about moving commuters and containers — it's also about connecting communities and moving commodities."

The Minneapolis field hearing was one of ten the congressionally named commission held around the country to gather input before it makes its recommendations to Congress.

Congress will consider the commission's recommendations as it prepares to draft the next multiyear federal transportation bill.

Congress created the commission in response to forecasts that the Federal Highway Trust Fund, the primary source of federal highway and transit funding, will go into the red as soon as 2009. Increasing construction costs and flat revenue projections contributed to the negative forecasts.

Much of the testimony at previous commission hearings focused on the need to address congestion bottlenecks near the nation's ports. Others suggested that states convert more of their highways to toll roads, an idea Lynch says is dead on arrival in Montana. "We don't have the traffic volumes necessary for toll roads,

and our residents have already paid for the roads through fuel taxes," Lynch said. "Montana just doesn't have alternatives to federal funding for our highways. I made sure the commission got that message."

For more information on the study commission, visit www.transportationfortomorrow.org.

"I made sure the commission understands the importance of safe and modern highways in rural states in getting our products to national and international markets."

MDT Director Jim Lynch

Study Reveals Fuel Tax Evasion Schemes

Revenues from motor fuel taxes are an important source of funding for Montana's transportation system. Motor fuel tax evasion represents a significant loss to this system. In the summer of 2004, in an effort to determine the amount of evasion, MDT initiated a research project to ascertain the extent of the problem and the underlying reasons for evasion.

The research showed an estimated loss of \$14.9 million due to uncollected motor fuel taxes. In addition, the study showed there are incentives to evade motor fuel taxes in Montana. Compared to bordering states, Montana has among the highest motor fuel tax rates — nearly twice those imposed by Wyoming. Montana's gasoline excise tax rate, at 27 cents per gallon, is 7 cents per gallon more than the average nationwide tax rate of 20.3 cents per gallon. Indeed, as of 2004, Montana imposed the fourth highest gasoline tax rate in the nation, notwithstanding any additional sales taxes imposed by other states on the sale of motor fuels. Montana's diesel tax rate is 27.75 cents per gallon.

Montana is not alone in its interest in curbing motor fuel tax evasion. States' concern over motor fuel excise tax evasion has generated numerous research efforts over the past two decades, resulting in the detection of various evasion methods and the development of new approaches for measuring evasion and techniques for curtailing it. The study outlines techniques that have been used to evade Montana motor fuel taxes. A few of those techniques are listed below:

- Border, dyed fuel, and alternative fuels schemes
- Refund and credit fraud
- International Fuel Tax Agreement fraud
- Daisy chains involving a chain of dummy corporations that transact several false purchases and eventually sell the fuel to a legal retail operation at taxed rates without remitting the tax
- Failure-to-file schemes

Based on information supplied by MDT and other agencies, the study generated a number of recommendations to close current enforcement gaps. Some of them are listed below:

- Perform more distributor audits and modify auditing procedures
- Expand field operations
- Extend the statute of limitations for motor fuel tax fraud
- Attempt to achieve total fuel accountability at all levels in the distribution chain
- Perform random and targeted retailer audits
- Establish an Internet Web site for the public to report incidents of evasion
- Maintain the distributor/importer education program
- Obtain and examine U.S. Customs data and compare to tax records
- Pierce the corporate veil by adopting a code section that would impose liabilities on business entities for failure to file required reports or to pay taxes, penalties, or interest

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MDT Recognized for Promoting Child Safety



Governor Brian Schweitzer presents the Ken Moore Community Service Award to MDT Director Jim Lynch who accepted it on behalf of the Department.

MDT's work to promote traffic safety was recognized at the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (HMHB) Annual Auction and Fundraiser held March 15. Director Jim Lynch accepted the Ken Moore Community Service Award on behalf of MDT. This is an award of excellence presented annually to an organization, group, or individual who exemplifies those

qualities that the Reverend Ken Moore brought to HMHB.

MDT received the award for dedication to the safety, health, and well-being of Montana's children, families, and communities in partnership with HMHB. Through HMHB, MDT works with Montana Safe Kids/Safe Communities, a network of 16 community-based coalitions that provide education, training, and public awareness in three main areas: proper safety belt use, child passenger safety, and impaired driving prevention.

MDT also works with HMHB through the Safe Routes to School Program. This program is dedicated to improving the health and safety of kids and communities by making walking and bicycling to school safer, easier, and more enjoyable.

HMHB is a statewide coalition of concerned citizens, community organizations, health educators, health professionals, and public-policy makers working together to improve the health of mothers and children in Montana. Reverend Moore was a supporter of HMHB in its early history. He shared the vision that every child is entitled to be raised in a safe and healthy emotional, physical, and spiritual environment.

Fuel Tax Evasion continued . . .

- Authorize the examination of records, fuels, and equipment
- Perform background checks and investigate license applicants
- Expand penalties and fines for noncompliance

The divisions involved with motor fuel tax reporting, auditing, evasion, and enforcement will use this report's recommendations to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing motor fuel program. With MDT management approval, recommendations that can be put into practice without legislation, will be implemented. This includes performing more distributor audits and maintaining the distributor education program. Other recommendations, such as extending the statute of limitations, piercing the corporate veil, and expanding penalties and fines for noncompliance, will be presented to MDT management for future legislative consideration.

A copy of this report is available on the Internet at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/admin/evasion.shtml>, or contact Sue Sillick at 444-7693 or ssillick@mt.gov.

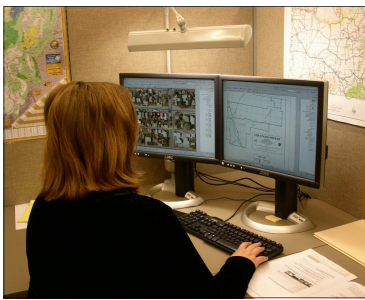
GPS Technology Aids MDT Map Makers

Each summer, MDT road inventory crews fan out across the state in specially equipped vehicles to record the position and mileage of Montana's public roads. Each crew is equipped with a laptop computer, specialized software, and a receiver that collects information from Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites.

As the vehicles travel over the roads, their receivers collect GPS points every second. The crews bring that information back to the central office and download it to a file. While more complicated than it sounds, cartographers then basically "connect the dots" to create maps that show roads in their precise locations.

MDT's Road Inventory and Mapping Section is responsible for developing and maintaining an inventory of Montana's more than 73,000 miles of public roads and using that information to prepare various maps including the official Montana Highway Map. GPS technology is key to ensuring those roads are shown in the right places on MDT's maps.

GPS technology is relatively new. In June of 1993, the U.S. Air Force launched the 24th Navstar satellite, completing the network of satellites known as the Global Positioning System. With a GPS receiver (some costing less than \$200), you can instantly learn your location on the planet — latitude, longitude, and even altitude.



MDT's Road Inventory and Mapping Section uses GPS data to create a variety of maps including the official Montana Highway Map.

This incredible technology was made possible by a combination of scientific and engineering advances, particularly the development of atomic clocks that are precise to within a billionth of a second.

Today, GPS has virtually limitless applications:

- Emergency vehicles use GPS to pinpoint destinations and map their routes.
- GPS helps locate vessels lost at sea.
- Trucking and transportation services use GPS to keep track of their fleets and shorten delivery time.
- Shipping companies equip their tankers and freighters with GPS for navigation and to record and control the movement of their vessels.
- Pleasure boaters, owners of small commercial vehicles, and civilian pilots use GPS for navigation.
- Hikers use GPS to navigate in the backcountry.
- Airlines have saved millions of dollars by using GPS to hone their flight plans.
- GPS is used regularly for mapping, measuring the earth, and surveying. It has been used to map roads, track forest fires, and to guide the blades of bulldozers, making grading accurate to within a few inches.
- Earth scientists use GPS to monitor earthquakes and the shifting of the earth's tectonic plates.

- Telecommunications companies increasingly rely on GPS to synchronize their land-based digital networks, comparing their reference clocks directly with GPS time.
- GPS receivers can track the positions of satellites.
- GPS units in automobiles can help drivers identify their location and direct them to their destinations.
- In-vehicle units can also help law enforcement agencies find stolen cars.
- GPS receivers can notify emergency services of a vehicle's location whenever an airbag deploys, reducing response times and increasing the chances of vehicle occupants surviving an accident.



Navstar satellites, such as the one pictured above, enable GPS users to pinpoint locations anywhere on Earth.

Future applications of GPS may include automated driving systems and technology that could help eliminate much of the traffic congestion that plagues our highways.

Not all that many years ago, maps were created by cartographers using pen and ink. Maps that took weeks, if not months, to create can now be made in a matter of minutes with a computer using GPS data. While it still takes time to collect and format the GPS data, it can be used in many different ways by many different users. GPS data has truly revolutionized MDT's road inventory and mapping processes.

Watch for Release of Draft TranPlan 21 Amendment

In 2005, Congress passed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). SAFETEA-LU and the subsequent federal regulations, released in February 2007, included several new planning requirements that require a limited amendment to *TranPlan 21*, Montana's statewide transportation policy plan, to address the following issues:

- Additional use of enhanced visualization techniques in the public involvement processes
- Consideration of transportation system security issues
- Incorporation of capital, operations and management strategies, investments, procedures, and other measures
- Consistency with other planning documents

The amendment effort is under way and includes opportunities for the public, interested agencies, and groups to participate. Check out the project Web site and use the questionnaire to share your input on the draft amendment at mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/tranplan21_amend. You can also call 800-714-7296 (TTY 444-7696 or 800-335-7592) or send an e-mail to mdt_TP21_2007@mt.gov for more information and updates.

Watch for release of the draft amendment late this summer!



Cool Tips for a Safe Summer Trip

1. Before You Go

Regular maintenance such as tune-ups, oil changes, battery checks, tire rotations, and so forth go a long way toward preventing breakdowns before they happen. If your vehicle has been serviced according to the manufacturer's recommendations, it should be in good shape and nearly ready to travel. If not — or you don't know the service history of the vehicle you plan to drive — schedule a preventive maintenance check-up with your mechanic now.

Providing your vehicle is well maintained, getting it ready for a road trip is relatively quick and easy. However, it's important to perform the following basic safety checks before you go:

Vehicle Safety Checklist

- **Tires** — Air pressure, tread wear, spare

Check the air pressure in all your tires, especially the neglected spare. To get an accurate reading, check pressure when tires are cold, meaning they haven't been driven on for at least three hours. It's a good idea to keep a tire pressure gauge on hand in your vehicle for this purpose. You can find the correct pressure for your tires listed on a label inside the driver's door frame or in the vehicle's owner's manual — the correct pressure is not the number listed on the tire itself.

Also, take five minutes to inspect your tires for signs of excessive or irregular wear. If the tread is worn down to 1/16 of an inch, it's time to replace your tires. If you find irregular tread wear patterns, it means your tires need rotation and/or your wheels need to be realigned before you leave. For more information on tire safety and pressure, visit the "Tires" section of www.safercar.gov, a vehicle safety resource of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

- **Belts and Hoses** — Condition and fittings

Look under the hood and inspect all belts and hoses to make sure they are in good shape with no signs of blisters, cracks, or cuts in the rubber. High summer temperatures accelerate the rate at which rubber belts and hoses degrade, so it's best to replace them now if they show signs of obvious wear. While you're at it, check all hose connections to make sure they're secure.

- **Wiper Blades** — Wear and tear on both sides

After the heavy duty imposed by winter storms and spring

rains, it's likely that your windshield wipers are ragged from use and ready to be replaced. Moreover, like rubber belts and hoses, wiper blades are susceptible to the summer heat. Examine your blades for signs of wear and tear. If they aren't in tip-top condition, invest in new ones before you go.



- **Cooling System** — Needed servicing and coolant level

Carefully check your coolant level to make sure it's adequate. In addition, if it's time to have your cooling system flushed and re-filled (or even nearly time), have it done now. On a long road trip in summer heat, you'll want your cooling system functioning at peak performance to avoid the possibility of your engine overheating.

- **Fluid Levels** — Oil, brake, transmission, power steering, coolant, and windshield

Obviously, you'll want to check your vehicle's oil level. And as with coolant, if it's time or even nearly time to have the oil changed, now would be a good time to do it. In addition, check the following fluid levels: brake, automatic transmission, power steering, windshield washer, and coolant. Make sure each reservoir is full and if you see any sign of fluid leakage, take your vehicle in to be serviced.

- **Lights** — Headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers, interior lights, and trailer lights

See and be seen! Ensure all the lights on your vehicle are in working order. Check your headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers, and interior lights. Towing a trailer? Be sure to check your trailer lights too. Failure of trailer light connections is a common problem and a serious safety hazard.

- **Air Conditioning** — Sensitive to heat? Check AC performance before traveling.

If you're traveling with someone sensitive to heat, you may also want to ensure that your air conditioning system is functioning properly. Lack of air conditioning on a hot summer day can adversely affect people who are in poor health or are sensitive to heat, such as children and seniors. If the air is not blowing cold, it's a good idea to have the system repaired before you go, especially since emergency, on-the-road repairs can be more costly than those you plan in advance.

Summer Safety Alert!

Remember: Never leave children unattended in parked vehicles — especially during warmer weather. Even on a relatively cool summer day and with windows partially cracked open, temperatures inside a vehicle can soar, rapidly causing occupants to suffer from heat illness or even die from heatstroke.

2. What to Take

Some take-along items make your trip more pleasant, such as favorite CDs to listen to or snacks to tide you over until the next rest stop. Others items help keep you and your passengers safer. While you don't want to ever overload your vehicle, you will want to make room for basic safety equipment.



Child Safety Seats

If you'll be traveling with children, you'll need to make room in your back seat for appropriate child safety and/or booster seats. NHTSA guidelines for proper child safety and booster seat use can be found at www.boosterseat.gov under "Which seat is right for my child?"

Emergency Roadside Kit

Even a well-maintained vehicle can break down, so it's advisable to put together an Emergency Roadside Kit to carry with you. A cell phone tops the list of suggested emergency kit contents since it allows you to call for help when and where you need it. Suggested Emergency Roadside Kit contents include:

- Cell phone
- First-aid kit
- Flashlight
- Flares and a white flag
- Jumper cables
- Jack (and ground mat) for changing a tire
- Work gloves and a change of clothes
- Basic repair tools and some duct tape (for temporarily repairing a hose leak!)
- A jug of water and paper towels for cleaning up
- Nonperishable food, drinking water, and medicines
- Extra windshield washer fluid
- Maps

3. On the Road

Getting there is half the fun of a road trip vacation. It's also half the hassle. Plenty of distractions both inside and outside your vehicle can take your attention from the road. Cranky fellow travelers, traffic congestion, road construction and detours, ringing cell phones, unfamiliar roads, and loud music are just a few you might encounter. While you can expect some distractions, you can also counter them with safe driving techniques to help you keep your focus.

Tips for Staying Focused

The best way to stay focused while driving is to avoid fatigue. So schedule your trip to allow for frequent breaks. Stopping for food or beverages, taking time to pull over at a rest stop just to stretch your legs, staying overnight at a motel or local bed and breakfast, and sharing the driving are all good strategies for avoiding fatigue and staying alert behind the wheel.

Traveling with Children

Remember that long trips can be especially tough on children. Stopping along the way makes the trip easier and less tiring for them as well — and more of an adventure too! Also, bring along a few favorite books or soft toys to keep the little ones content and occupied. The trip will seem to go faster for them, perhaps lessen the number of times they ask, "Are we there yet?", and better enable you to keep your attention on driving.

Buckle Up America. Every Trip. Every Time.

Along with staying focused, make sure everyone in your vehicle is buckled up properly at all times. **In fact, buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to keep yourself and your passengers safe while on the road.**

The above information is from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

And Don't Forget Your Pet Pals



- When riding in a vehicle, pets should be behind a pet barrier, confined to a crate or carrier, or constrained in a "pet seat belt." Crates and carriers should be well-ventilated and large enough for the animal to stand, sit, lie down, and turn around.
- Never leave a pet alone in a parked vehicle. On a hot day, even with the windows open, temperatures can quickly reach dangerous levels.
- Remember, a leash is mandatory at highway rest stops.
- For more tips on traveling with your pet, go to http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/caring_for_pets_when_you_travel/traveling_by_car.html.

Transit Tales

Glacier Park Shuttle Buses Offer Visitors Convenience and Comfort



Starting July 2007, visitors to Glacier National Park can take advantage of the park's new passenger shuttle bus system. Rides are free and transit stops will be clearly

marked along the Going-to-the-Sun Road.

The shuttle system allows visitors to avoid the traffic and parking problems associated with rehabilitation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road and offers park visitors an alternative to driving.

MDT, Flathead County, and Glacier National Park are cooperating in the effort to provide shuttle services in the park during peak tourist season. The remaining months of year, the buses will be used for public transportation in other Montana communities. For more information on Glacier National Park's new shuttle system, visit the Glacier National Park Web site at www.nps.gov/glac/planyourvisit/shuttles.htm or call visitor information at 888-7800. The TDD number is 888-7806.

MDT Announces Safe Routes to School Funding Awards

MDT Director Jim Lynch has announced the first grant awards for MDT's new Safe Routes to School Program. The program funds initiatives to improve student safety within two miles of K-8 schools.



"We're excited to have the opportunity to support Montana communities in this way," Lynch said in announcing the awards. "This

program and these community-based projects will help us save lives and protect children who walk and bike to school."

This year, the program will fund 22 projects in 17 Montana communities for a total cost of nearly \$840,000. Projects include education and enforcement initiatives and signing and sidewalk improvements. MDT developed the Safe Routes to School Program in response to 2005 federal legislation that, for the first time, provided dedicated federal funding for state-level Safe Routes to School Programs.

Safe Routes Guidebook Available in Early July

MDT's Safe Routes to School Guidebook will be available in early July. The guidebook is designed to provide technical assistance for Montana schools and communities interested in establishing a Safe Routes to School Program. Highlights include reasons schools should start safe routes programs, specific examples of activities, and guidelines on how to implement and evaluate programs. A copy of the guidebook will be available on the Internet at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/saferoutes>.

For more information on the Safe Routes to School Program or to order a hard copy of the guidebook, contact coordinator Virginia Summey at 449-8611 or 877-935-7233.

Final STIP Distributed in June

The final version of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) was distributed the second week of June. The STIP is a list of most major transportation projects planned for Montana for the next three federal fiscal years.

In April, MDT published a draft version of the STIP in the *Newsline* and requested public comments. Those comments have been incorporated into the final STIP.

You can review this document at your local library or on the Internet at www.mdt.mt.gov. If you would like a hard copy, contact MDT Project Analysis Manager Gary Larson at one of the following numbers or addresses:

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CTEP Spotlight



Introducing . . . Terry Voeller

Terry comes to MDT/CTEP from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, where he worked for several years in the Floodplain Management Section of the Water Resources Division.

Some of you who have been involved in floodplain permitting may already know Terry. As you can see, he believes in "Safety First"!

Terry lives in Helena, has a 9-year-old son named Clayton, and enjoys camping, hiking, and golf.

Terry has lots of experience working with local governments, and he is a great addition to CTEP. You can reach Terry at 444-9457 or tvoeller@mt.gov.

Other CTEP News:

For the past year, CTEP been in the process of designing, testing, and implementing a new database management system. The system is now up and running, thanks to the CTEP staff and database builder, Andy Metroka from Xybernaut Solutions, LLC. The new system, which went "live" May 25, gives CTEP the ability to manage projects and quickly gather accurate data. With this system, CTEP has taken a huge step forward in using current technology to keep CTEP projects on track.

The new CTEP manual is on-schedule with a projected ready date of August 2007. Each chapter has been carefully edited to create an informative, user-friendly manual.

More History by the Highway

The Laurel Roadside Museum

by Jon Axline, MDT Historian

Despite the crippling effects of the Great Depression, America was a country on the move in the 1930s. Thousands of Americans took to the roads to inspect the country's scenic wonders and to take advantage of its recreational opportunities. Montana and the Montana Highway Department were more than willing to accommodate them. The responsibility for promoting tourism in the Treasure State fell to the highway department and its Plans Engineer Bob Fletcher. Beginning in 1934 with the first "official" highway map, Fletcher, with the blessing of the State Highway Commission, developed an ambitious program to draw tourists to the state and keep them here as long as possible by promoting Montana's natural resources and colorful history. To that end, Fletcher oversaw the creation of the highway historical markers in 1935, roadside picnic areas, information centers, the ports-of-entry stations, the acquisition of Pictograph Cave outside of Billings, and the establishment of a roadside museum program in 1938.

Fletcher planned the roadside museums as joint efforts between the highway department and local chambers of commerce. He envisioned a chain of roadside museums across the state, each devoted to a single subject, such as geology, paleontology, wildlife, history, and Indian culture. Each museum would include dioramas, specimens, models, photographs, and maps. An "alert, well-informed attendant" would be in charge of each museum to provide tourists with information about its displays and other local attractions. Fletcher contacted chambers of commerce in cities along U.S. Highways 10 and 91, eventually interesting several communities in the plan. The highway department developed the architectural design for the museums and would build them, but it was up to local organizations to staff and maintain them.

In March 1938, the Laurel *Outlook* announced that the Montana Highway Department would build a museum in Northern Pacific Park at the junction of U.S. Highways 10 and 310 in Laurel. The design accompanying the article showed a rustic log building with a cobblestone-veneered foundation that was similar in design to the highway department's information centers and ports-of-entry stations. The two-room building would also house the city's police department. The Laurel Commercial Club hired Max Big Man, a Crow Indian from the Hardin area, to curate the museum and provide lectures on Indian life to tourists. He and his family lived in two tepees set up in the park near the museum. A black bear named Susie lived in a cage on the museum grounds between the two tepees. Bob Fletcher built the exhibit cases in the museum and provided most of the artifacts shown in them. Indeed, he acquired the stone tools exhibited at the Laurel museum from Pictograph Cave archaeological

site outside of Billings. The department's graphic artist, Ervin "Shorty" Shope, created the dioramas, including one depicting the arrival of man in the region. Other exhibits included fossils, dinosaur bones, and a large mounted bison head loaned by local businessmen.

By all accounts, the museum was a popular tourist attraction for motorists on their way to and from Yellowstone National Park over the newly opened Beartooth Highway. Laurel Commercial Club member J. F. MacDonald boasted that much of the museum's popularity was based on word of mouth. He estimated that during the summers, up to 100 people a day visited the museum in Laurel — some, in fact, stopping twice to take in the informative exhibits and listen to Big Man's popular lectures. For four years, the museum opened its doors to visitors every Memorial Day and closed down for the season on Labor Day weekend.

Pearl Harbor changed everything. The federal government withdrew most of its funding to state highway departments to pay for the war. For the first time since 1933, the Montana Highway Department lost employees

as they left to join the military or to take jobs in the war industries on the West Coast. The state's highway program nearly ceased to exist as funds could only be spent on strategically important highways with the authorization of the War Department. When the Laurel museum closed down in September 1941, it never reopened as a tourist attraction. By 1945, the Laurel Police Department was the sole occupant of the entire building. What happened to the dioramas, models, and artifacts that decorated the museum remains a mystery.

Despite the apparent success of the Laurel museum, the idea did not catch on in the other cities that expressed interest in the program. The Highway Commission built a museum at Pictograph Cave outside of Billings in 1938, but vandalism and fire caused it to close down by 1945. When the Billings Commercial Club wanted to open a museum across U.S. Highway 87 from the Yellowstone County Fairgrounds in Billings in 1939, the highway commission donated the land but was not involved with the design, construction, or operation of the museum.

The Laurel museum was the crown jewel of the highway department's tourism programs during the Great Depression. Although ultimately a failure, the museum inspired the construction of other roadside attractions by private individuals during the 1950s and 1960s, many of which are still located next to Montana's highways. The Laurel museum still exists and is located in Fireman's Park in Laurel. The building is currently occupied by the Laurel Chamber of Commerce and was recently rehabilitated with funding provided through MDT's Community Transportation Enhancement Program.



The former Laurel roadside museum now houses the local Chamber of Commerce.

MDT Wants Your Comments

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, visit http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/docs/trans_comm/proposed_proj.pdf, or give us a call at 1-800-714-7296. You can mail your comments on proposed projects to MDT at the following address or e-mail them to mdtnewprojects@mt.gov.

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Inside This Issue

Watch for Work Zone Signs of Summer	1
Director Testifies Before National Transportation Panel.....	1
Study Reveals Fuel Tax Evasion Schemes.....	2
MDT Recognized for Promoting Child Safety	2
GPS Technology Aids MDT Map Makers	3
Watch for Release of Draft TranPlan 21 Amendment.....	3
Cool Tips for a Safe Summer Trip.....	4
Transit Tales	6
Final STIP Ready by Late June.....	6
CTEP Spotlight	6
More History by the Highway: Laurel Roadside Museum.....	7

Contact Information

Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call 800-714-7296 (in Montana only) or 406-444-3423. The TTY number is 406-444-7696 or 800-335-7592.

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MDT's mission is to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment.

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